

The Gulf

BELLE BOGGS

READING GUIDE QUESTIONS

Belle is happy to Skype with book clubs—if you'd like to be in touch, feel free to email her at belleboggs@gmail.com.

1. Why does Marianne agree to go to the Ranch despite her reservations?
2. Why does Marianne feel so guilty about her role at the Ranch?
3. In contrast with Marianne, why do you think Eric seems to have so few misgivings about the Ranch?
4. Where do you imagine Marianne in 5 years? Janine? Davonte? Eric?
5. What do you think the story of Terri Schiavo represents to Janine?
6. On Page 303, Marianne writes to Janine:

You are a poet... and that is something you just can't help, like a disease or a birth defect...

Do you agree with this view of human personality and ability?

7. Have you ever been in a situation, like Marianne in Brooklyn at the beginning of the book, where you felt there was nothing left for you? If so, how did you respond to that feeling?

8. On page 26, Marianne lists some of her beliefs:

Ruth was wrong to say that Marianne didn't believe in anything. She believed in things you could see or prove. She believed in science, believed in abortions, believed in the miracle of stem cells. She believed in population control and drug legalization, gun control and public transportation. She believed in generous arts grants and taxes for the rich. She thought everyone should be an organ donor and should have no say in the matter. She thought cats and dogs should be spayed

and neutered, and that no one should have children before the age of thirty. She believed in climate change and the electric car, in NPR and PBS, in free speech and online privacy and free lunch and Medicaid. She believed in gay marriage and no marriage.

Is there a common thread among them? If so, what is it?

9. Compare Marianne's beliefs from Page 26 with Janine's on Page 23:

She did not for the life of her understand why a student prayer group could not pray before assemblies and football games. She questioned teaching sex ed to middle-schoolers. She thought that parents should take more responsibility for their own children, instead of expecting the schools to feed them breakfast, lunch, and snack and teach them things that were once learned in church or at home.

10. Would any of Marianne's or Janine's beliefs pose an obstacle for you in building a friendship with someone who held it?

11. Do you think it is possible to teach creativity?

12. What is the responsibility that teachers have to their students? From your perspective, does the Ranch let its students down?

13. Why do you think Boggs set her novel in Florida? How does the setting impact the novel?

14. How important is it for art to impart a positive message? Should art with a positive message be judged by different standards? How do you define a "positive message"?